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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: DECEMBER 1 PRESIDENT OBAMA'S ADDRESS ON
AFGHANISTAN; 12/03/09; BUENOS AIRES

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1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

All local dailies carry wire service stories and opinion pieces on President Obama's West Point speech. Press reaction was cautiously positive, praising Obama's determination to put an end to the war, but questioning the feasibility of the strategy. The general tone was one of skepticism, with most journalists portraying the decision to send more troops as a risky bet and questioning whether withdrawal would really begin in 2011. Several articles also noted the lack of support for the new strategy by European and ISAF countries. Key themes were: President Obama's need to beat back the Taliban and bring a quicker end to a "costly and unpopular" eight-year-long war; the lengthy internal debate about the new strategy, which allegedly took several months with President Obama meeting not only with members of his Cabinet but with military and political advisors as well; President Obama's request for additional troops from European countries; concern about increased military expenditures given the high U.S. unemployment rate and deficit; lack of support for the new strategy by EU and ISAF countries; skepticism from some Obama advisers about investing more troops and money when the Kabul government is widely seen as corrupt and inept; and opinion polls indicating high percentages of rejection of the war in Afghanistan. The opinion piece written by daily-of-record "La Nacion's" Washington-based correspondent, Silvia Pisani, is more critical than the paper's usual pro-US editorial position on the issue.

2. FRONT-PAGE HEADLINES

- Daily-of-record "La Nacion": "Obama's bet: more troops to Afghanistan."

3. IN-PAGE HEADLINES

- Daily-of-record "La Nacion": "Obama bets on deploying more troops (in Afghanistan)."

- Leading circulation "Clarín": "Afghanistan: US will send 30,000 more troops but will withdraw in 2011."

- Centrist "Crítica": "Barack Obama goes out to hunt the Taliban."

- Business-financial "El Cronista": "Obama will send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan and promises to withdraw in 2011."

- Business-financial "Buenos Aires Económico": "Obama takes a risk: he will send 30,000 more soldiers to Afghanistan to obtain a 'fast' victory."

- Business-financial "Ámbito Financiero": "Obama will send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan (withdrawal will start in 2011)."

- Left-of-center "Página 12": "Obama launches his 'Game over' plan." "Obama's war plan divides the EU: two (countries) will send (additional) troops and two others will not."

- Liberal, English-language "Buenos Aires Herald": "Obama to speed troop deployment to Afghanistan."

- Conservative "La Prensa": "Obama sends additional troops to Afghanistan."

14. OPINION SUMMARIES

- "A risky decision that could mark his presidency"

Silvia Pisani, daily-of-record "La Nación," opines (12/02), "This is the riskiest decision of the Obama administration, and perhaps the most difficult to understand. A Nobel Prize winner has just announced more war.

"Never before have the rates of rejection of the Afghanistan war been so high, with only four of every 10 Americans willing to understand why one should be killed there.

"Obama's step will imply a military expenditure that his fellow citizens do not want: in total, some 30 billion dollars per year now that the unemployment rate is higher than 10 per cent.

"Obama addressed a difficult audience, an international community that will hardly be satisfied with this. He spoke to some people who do not want more war, lawmakers who do not want to approve more expenditures, soldiers that are not sure of what they are doing in a foreign land and who have the highest rate of suicides ever known.

"For sure, a long time will have passed before the sense of this

decision is known. Before this is unveiled, Obama will travel to Oslo to receive his Nobel Peace Prize."

- "Afghanistan: the US will send 30,000 more troops but it will withdraw in 2011"

Ana Baron, leading "Clarín's" Washington-based correspondent, writes (12/02), "The number of Americans who compare the confrontation in Afghanistan with the war in Vietnam has increased remarkably during recent months. This is why President Barack Obama announced yesterday that he will send 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan while he set July 2011 to start the US withdrawal from the country. However, is his strategy realistic?"

"Obama's goal is weakening the Taliban so that Afghan security forces can have time and room to develop and can eventually be replaced by US troops. The second mission of the US troops to be sent to Afghanistan will be to train Afghan security forces to take charge when the time comes."

"While Obama made clear that the 100,000 US soldiers will gradually start their withdrawal from Afghanistan, there will be US military presence for a long time."

- "Barack Obama will go out to hunt the Taliban"

Macarena Vidal, centrist "Crítica's" Washington-based correspondent, highlights (12/02), "The White House's new strategy is 'to dismantle and defeat Al Qaeda network and prevent its return to Afghanistan.' For this purpose, Obama will increase the number of troops at a much faster rhythm than currently. In this way, he wants to speed up the training of Afghan forces so that they can take charge of the country's security by 2011, when US troops will start withdrawing from the country."

"With this measure, Obama wants to ensure US citizens (who are increasingly disappointed with the war) that the stay of troops does not have an 'unlimited nature.' The only thing Obama did not commit himself to announce is the date when the withdrawal will be finished or its rhythm. That will be subject to the 'field conditions.'"

- "Two (countries) will send (additional) troops and two will not"

Left-of-center "Página 12's" Paris-based correspondent Eduardo Febbro writes (12/02) "Two countries will send troops and two will not. For different reasons, France and Germany refused to send additional troops to Afghanistan as requested by President Barack Obama. For their part, UK and Spain will endorse the US President's strategy."

"Nonetheless, even with the additional troops from the UK and Spain, Barack Obama will not obtain from his allies the 10,000 additional troops he had requested."

"Out of the 45 country-members of the International Security

Assistance Force (of which 26 are NATO members), just a few are willing to support Obama's new strategy.

"Obama's strategy has exasperated many Europeans due to the slow implementation of his strategy. Several capital cities consider their men have been suffering for eight years and have contributed more than what they should to the Afghan cause. The absolutely military option has not generated consensus among his allies, particularly when Afghan President Hamid Karzai has become an embarrassing ally due to the corruption that marked his first term in office and the massive fraud in his re-election Afghanistan is for many experts a dead-end ally."

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